

WALLACE ROY ERNST, 1928–1971

JOHN H. THOMAS

Department of Biological Sciences
Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305
and

Department of Botany
California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco 94118

STANWYN G. SHETLER

Department of Botany, Museum of Natural History
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560

It is difficult to write about a close friend of long duration. The better one knows an individual, the harder it is to write the things one wants to say, and at the same time to write what the friend would want to have written about him.

What we write is in three parts. The first is by Stanwyn Shetler and is the tribute he wrote to Wallace Roy Ernst and read before the 18th Annual Systematics Symposium at the Missouri Botanical Garden on October 16, 1971. The second part is by John Thomas. The third part (by both of us) is an account of some of the important events and dates in Wally's life and a list of his writings.

— 1 —

Although Wally would be uncomfortable if he were here today to hear us, it is altogether fitting that we should pause a moment at this Symposium, which he frequently attended, to pay tribute to his memory. I am honored to be asked to say a few words about our late colleague and friend.

Wallace Roy Ernst died peacefully Friday night a week ago, the 8th of October, at the Washington Hospital Center, Washington, D.C., after a long and often painful illness with cancer. He was only 43 years of age. Just a year ago Wally was still pursuing his research with full vigor, although signs of ill health had been building up. Through the late fall and early winter [of 1970] his health deteriorated rapidly, and in late January of this year Wally learned the fateful news that he was dying of cancer. Wally accepted this news stoically and began an heroic but foredoomed fight to stay on his feet and continue his work. Against considerable odds he did continue his research between periods of hospitalization and completed his 5-year effort on the genus *Lamourouxia* (Scrophulariaceae), sending it to the Smithsonian Press in the summer. This paper is now in galley proof. For Wally, this cleaned the slate and brought him great satisfaction. Even so, he was not content to brood on his fate and wait idly for death, and he began to lay plans for work on

the Theophrastaceae. But for this will and fierce determination, Wally would have succumbed months earlier. During all the long months of illness, at times marked by excruciating pain, I never once heard him complain. Instead he would ask about the well-being of his many friends who came to see him. He was touched and constantly amazed by the number of friends throughout the world who took time to remember him with cards, letters, flowers, gifts, and personal visits.

I first learned to know Wally when he came to work at the Smithsonian in 1963. Immediately, we became fast friends. Wally was a faithful friend who lived without pretention and expected as much of his friends. He abhorred artificiality and officiousness and sometimes was misunderstood for this. I will always remember him as a person who said and stood for what he believed.

In his professional work, Wally set and demanded high standards, no less of himself than of others, and he would not compromise his standards even though they sometimes brought him frustrations. During his short years, however, he found time to conduct studies in a broad range of groups—Papaveraceae, Fumariaceae, Cappariaceae, Loasaceae, Scrophulariaceae, and others. He had an extremely broad knowledge of plant families and often put this knowledge to use in helping his colleagues or the lay public with their identification problems.

Wally's summers with the National Park Service during his earlier years imbued him with a lasting concern for the quality of public education in natural history.

He was a refined and cultured man, who enjoyed art, music, and fine cuisine. He loved to collect pottery, paintings, and Navajo rugs.

Wally loved his native state of California and always gave his California friends and memories a special place in his heart and mind. He taught me the delicate pleasures of its vineyards and the exquisite beauties of its landscapes and natural history. One of the most touching moments I witnessed during his illness came when he showed me Roxana Ferris' latest book on California wildflowers, *Flowers of the Point Reyes National Seashore*, which she so thoughtfully had sent him. The memories it brought back caused his eyes to sparkle with warmth and feeling. His ashes are being returned to his beloved land.

Wally was genuine. A good and decent person, a kind and gentle friend, an honest and worthy colleague. He deserved his full three-score and ten years. He will be missed, and we shall always remember him.

— 2 —

I first met Wally in the very late fall of 1952. He was a graduate student with Harlan Lewis at the University of California at Los Angeles. I was just out of the U.S. Navy and he was about to be in the U.S. Army. Our paths did not cross again until Wally came to Stanford in the fall of 1955 to begin his work for a doctorate.

Wally worked very hard to attain his degrees. This he did largely on

his own financial base and often by the use of frugal measures. Perhaps it should not be mentioned, but he sometimes slept on the roof of the old botany building at UCLA to avoid having to pay for the gasoline to drive to his parents' home in the Highland Park District of Los Angeles, some 16 miles away. I think that much of Wally's extreme generosity stemmed from his early experience of having to make so much out of limited financial resources.

At Stanford as graduate students we became friends, shared neighboring desks, and exchanged many of our thoughts, fears, and delights.

Wally was an expert gardener. And most amazingly, he did his gardens without the expenditure of much money. What made his garden grow was his green thumb, genuine expertise, good design, and the physical effort he put into it. His Stanford garden was near perfect, because Wally was a perfectionist.

Wally's dissertation with Richard W. Holm was a comparative study of the Papaveraceae. The main emphasis was on floral morphology and this continued to be one of his main interests. During his graduate work he participated in much more departmental teaching than the current crop of graduate students have become accustomed to expect. He assisted not only in botany courses, but also in several courses in general biology and zoology. In all he was very good—Wally was one of those people who just plain knew a lot about living things.

At earlier times in his career, and as a student at Stanford, he served as a ranger naturalist in the National Park Service, particularly in the Kings-Sequoia area of the Sierra Nevada of California and at Crater Lake in the Oregon Cascades.

Wally, like all of us, could be diffident and difficult. On the day he took his final examination for the doctorate, he would not call to let anyone know that he had passed, much less allow any kind of a celebration. I had to call him, after finding out that he had done exceedingly well, to congratulate him. Wally was always very modest about his own accomplishments and tended to deprecate them.

From Stanford Wally went to a temporary position at the Herbarium of the University of California at Berkeley. Here he put new life into the California Botanical Society. Due to his efforts, attendance doubled almost overnight at the monthly meetings. After some nine months at Berkeley, he went to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to work in the Gray-Arnold complex at Harvard University on the *Generic Flora of the Southeastern United States*. It was during this period that he put the final touch of perfection on his dissertation.

After contributing a number of treatments to the Southeastern Flora, Wally was appointed to the staff of the Department of Botany in the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. His initial assignment was to aid in the work on certain floras of the southwestern part of the Pacific and his official responsibility in the United States National Herbarium was the flora of Eurasia.

During Wally's tenure at the Smithsonian, I had a number of occasions to visit him. He was always most generous, insisting to a fault, for instance, that I stay with him, even though this meant that he would sleep on the floor while I slept comfortably in the bed he had vacated. Wally's generosity was one of his hallmarks. On more than one occasion, I deplaned in Virginia or Maryland in the very early morning, and there was Wally despite my positive assertions that I could get into the center of the District of Columbia by way of public transportation. In his time at the Smithsonian, Wally met and took to the airport more visiting botanists than one can count. And many of these he entertained either in his small efficiency apartment, or in Washington's interesting and better restaurants or both!

Not all of Wally's Smithsonian experience was peaches and cream for him personally. When he first arrived, his space was a desk in an alcove in the "Castle". His principles of excellence, of perfection, and his insight into the nature and philosophy of systematic biology, brought him into conflict with some of his colleagues. Wally would do anything to help if there was a scientific rationale involved. If someone or something seemed stupid to him, he was adamant to the point of being obstinate. He was in this way more openly honest than most of us are. Fortunately he lived to see his principles vindicated and his early problems surmounted, as he was for several years before his death a full curator in the Department of Botany.

During all of Wally's graduate and scientific career, the one person he held in greatest esteem was Henry J. Thompson. Not only was Harry involved in his graduate work at UCLA, but he continued as a friend and collaborator. Both Harry and Wally won the Cooley Award of the American Society of Plant Taxonomists individually. They won it jointly later on.

Wally's Washington years were relatively happy ones. He did miss a garden and the easy access to the poppies of the West. This was offset to an extent by the opportunities to visit the Caribbean, particularly the island of Dominica, many parts of Europe, Russia, and North Africa. An additional satisfaction was his appointment as Professor in absentia at the University of Kansas, an appointment that carried a small, but nevertheless substantial, stipend.

The first inkling I had of Wally's illness was in December of 1970. He called early one morning from Los Angeles, where he was visiting his mother, to say that he had to get back to Washington for his work was very pressing. This did seem peculiar in retrospect. Early in January of 1971 he found that he had cancer. I quote from his letter of February 1, 1971:

"For a little more than two weeks I have been at the Washington Hospital Center. . . . The prognosis is very grim. Soon will start some chemical therapy which may—or most likely will require surgery to place

a catheter in the hepatic artery. With luck I will be able to go to my apartment, work a little, and have outpatient treatment. Slowly I am being able to face what this means and today I am feeling a lot better. My Mother only knows that I am sick and will receive additional treatment. I really don't want everybody to know about this but a liver tumor is a liver tumor. I have had the best of everything, fine doctors, and a wonderful friend who helps me."

Wally knew that he would die, but even then, as always, he did not complain for himself. I saw him last in May of 1971. He still insisted upon being the perfect host, even though it pained him much.

During his illness Wally was taken care of with kindness and consideration by Mark Carnivale, a friend of many years. Mark provided the comfort and help Wally needed as he became progressively more incapacitated. Wally died on October 8, 1971. His wish was that his ashes be scattered over the southern Sierra Nevada of California, an area where the poppies he studied and loved occur by the millions.

The irony of it all is that when we were students, we used to joke that: "Only the good die young." Wally was very, very good.

— 3 —

Wally was born in Los Angeles, California, on May 2, 1928. His father was Charles Joseph Ernst, 1893–1957, who came to Los Angeles from Kansas. He worked for the City of Los Angeles throughout most of his career. Wally's mother is Velma B. Ernst, a native of Southern California, and lives in Los Angeles. Wally had only one sibling, a brother, Charles Edwin Ernst, who for many years was involved in county management, particularly in San Mateo and Los Angeles counties.

Wally attended elementary and high schools in Los Angeles and graduated from Franklin High School in 1946. From 1946 to 1948 he attended Los Angeles City College and received an A.A. degree in life sciences in 1948. From there he went to the University of California at Los Angeles, receiving his A.B. degree in botany in 1950 and his M.A. degree in plant sciences in 1953. He was in residence at Stanford University from 1955 through 1960, and he received his Ph.D. in biological sciences in June of 1962.

From Sept. 21, 1953, through Sept. 2, 1955, Wally served in the United States Army in the capacity of a medical laboratory technician. His service included a period of time in Germany.

For several summers, starting in 1949, he worked in a number of the western National Parks, mainly Yosemite, Kings, Sequoia, and Crater Lake, in capacities that ranged from lifeguard to labor crew foreman in blister rust control to ranger-naturalist.

Wally's botanical field experience included all the western and south-western states, with particular emphasis on the Pacific States, Baja California and many other parts of Mexico, Dominica and other islands in

the Caribbean, New England, North Africa, and Europe including European Russia.

A notice of Wally's death appeared in Madroño 21:69, 1971. *The Washington Post* of Tuesday, October 12, 1971, and the *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.) of the same date carried short obituaries. *The Smithsonian Torch* in the Fall 1971 number carried a short notice. Volume 21 of Madroño was dedicated to Wally and his picture constitutes the frontispiece of that volume.

LIST OF WRITINGS

1953. A new species of *Clarkia* (Onagraceae). Madroño 12:89-92.
The derivation of *Clarkia delicata* and *Clarkia similis*, two allotetraploid species. M.A. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles. 48 pp.
1958. A lawn weed from Stanford University, California. Leafl. W. Bot. 8:272. (With J. H. Thomas)
Chromosome numbers of some western Papaveraceae. Contr. Dudley Herb. 5:109-115.
1959. Chromosome numbers of some Papaveraceae. Contr. Dudley Herb. 5:137-139.
1961. On the family status of Fumariaceae. Amer. J. Bot. 48:546. (Abstract).
Blue grama at Goleta, California. Leafl. W. Bot. 9:180.
1962. A comparative morphology of the Papaveraceae. Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University. xii + 213 pp.
The genera of Papaveraceae and Fumariaceae in the southeastern United States. J. Arnold Arbor. 43:315-343.
Comments on the International Organization of Biosystematists. Taxon 11:139. (With R. M. Tryon)
1963. The genera of Capparaceae and Moringaceae in the Southeastern United States. J. Arnold Arbor. 44:81-95.
The Loasaceae in the southeastern United States. J. Arnold Arbor. 44:138-142. (With H. J. Thompson)
The genera of Hamamelidaceae and Platanaceae in the southwestern United States. J. Arnold Arbor. 44:193-210.
Contrasting patterns of variation in *Eucnide* and *Sympetaleia* (Loasaceae). Amer. J. Bot. 50:638. (With H. J. Thompson, abstract)
1964. The genus *Eschscholzia* in the South Coast Ranges of California. Madroño 17:281-294.
The genera of Berberidaceae, Lardizabalaceae, and Menispermaceae in the southeastern United States. J. Arnold Arbor. 45:1-35.
Review of: Flora of our Sierran National Parks, by Samuel J. Pusateri. Madroño 17:171-172.
1965. Review of: Flora Europaea, Vol. 1, edited by T. G. Tutin et al. Madroño 18:62-63.
Documented chromosome numbers of plants. Madroño 18:122-126. (With others)
1967. Floral morphology and systematics of *Platystemon* and its allies *Hesperomecon* and *Meconella* (Papaveraceae: Platystemonoideae). Univ. Kansas Sci. Bull. 47:25-70.
Floral biology and systematics of *Eucnide* (Loasaceae). J. Arnold Arbor. 48:56-88. (With H. J. Thompson)
Proposal to conserve the generic name *Eucnide* Zuccarini, 1844, against *Microsperma* W. J. Hooker, 1839 (both Loasaceae). Taxon 16:77-78. (With H. J. Thompson)
Review of: Index to European taxonomic literature for 1965, compiled by R. K. Brummitt. Madroño 19:58-59.

1968. Proposal to conserve the generic name 7650. *Lamourouxia* H. B. K., 1818 (Scrophulariaceae), against *Lamourouxia* C. A. Agardh, 1817 (Delasseriaceae). *Taxon* 17:449-450.
1969. Review of: Rocky Mountain Flora, by W. A. Weber. *Madroño* 20:29-30.
1970. Floral morphology and systematics of *Lamourouxia*. *Amer. J. Bot.* 57:752. (Abstract)
- Two new species of *Lamourouxia* (Scrophulariaceae) in Mexico. *Madroño* 20:342-346. (With M. F. Baad)
- Review of: Flora Europaea, Vol. 2, edited by T. G. Tutin et al. *Madroño* 20:237.
1971. Review of: Flora of the Galapagos Islands, by I. L. Wiggins and D. M. Porter. *Madroño* 21:111-112.
1972. Floral morphology and systematics of *Lamourouxia* (Scrophulariaceae: Rhi-nanthoideae). *Smithsonian Contr. Bot.* 6:1-63.

NOTES AND NEWS

EDITORSHIP OF MADROÑO.—Robert Ornduff has resigned the editorship of *Madroño*. The Board of Directors of the California Botanical Society have appointed John L. Strother and Alan R. Smith (both members of the staff of the herbarium, Department of Botany, University of California, Berkeley 94720) Editor and Associate Editor, respectively.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF MEETING.—The California Botanical Society will hold its first meeting of the fall October 20-21, 1973, at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden. The meeting will take the form of a series of contributed papers, by students, in the areas of plant systematics and ecology. Members and non-members of the Society both professional and non-professional, are invited to attend. Advance registration (no fee) is requested. For registration forms or additional details contact ALAN R. SMITH, Department of Botany, University of California, Berkeley 94720, or DAVID YOUNG, Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, 1500 N. College Avenue, Claremont, California 91711.

TWO OREGON PLANT RECORDS.—*Lewisia Cotyledon* var. *Howellii* (Wats.) Jeps. was previously known in Oregon from Josephine and Curry Counties. On 25 March 1973, my husband and I discovered a new station in Cow Creek Canyon, Douglas County, Oregon. While climbing a large bluff of conglomerate composition we sighted one plant beginning to bloom. Upon searching, we counted 66 separate plants. Returning 15 April, we found the plants in full bloom and located many more small colonies with the aid of binoculars. They are growing in small, mostly inaccessible colonies of from one to fourteen plants at 300 to 450 meters with principally a southern exposure. We found a few plants with a western exposure and one plant on the north side of the bluff. One specimen is deposited at OSC.

Adiantum Jordanii K. Mull. has been reported from as far north as the Rogue River Canyon in Oregon. In May 1972, Mrs. Perry Thiele discovered this species at the base of a conglomerate bluff near the small town of Tennile, Douglas County, Oregon. On 25 March, 1973, Mr. & Mrs. O. E. Fosback located additional colonies of *Adiantum Jordanii* in Cow Creek Canyon, Douglas County, Oregon in the same area as *Lewisia Cotyledon* var. *Howellii*.—MRS. O. E. (JOAN) FOSBACK, 157 W. Bodie, Roseburg, Oregon 94770.